

Genesis 29:31-30:24 — Desperate Housewives

May 29, 2016

It is great to have you on this Memorial Day weekend. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are studying the book of Genesis. This morning we are in Genesis 29:31. Take out your notes and open your Bibles or iPads.

We know the ideal marriage situation is one man and one woman that are faithful to one another for life. They have children and die together in their old age. Many times it doesn't work that way. There are widows, divorces, infidelities, or out-of-wedlock pregnancies that we never expect. It doesn't take much for our families to become complicated or messy. Sometimes our family situations become so bizarre we begin to wonder if God can do any good from our dysfunctional family messes. If that is you, today there is good news. This morning we are studying one of the messiest most dysfunctional families in the Bible. We will see how God used this bizarre family as a grand display of his amazing grace. If he can use this family as a display of his grace and glory, there is hope for your family too.

As we jump in, let me get you up to speed. While this morning we are studying the life of Jacob, his story actually began with Grandpa Abraham three generations before. God began work in Grandpa Abraham's life in Genesis 12. God called him out of pagan Babylon to the Promised Land. He also promised Grandpa Abraham and Grandma Sarah that they would have a son. When no son arrived after many years, and Grandma Sarah was old, she took matters into her own hands. In desperation for a child she told her maid, Hagar, to go to bed

with Abraham, her husband. This shortcut resulted in the birth of Ishmael, who is the father of the Arab nations today. This was clearly not a good idea. It result in lots of friction in Abraham's family. Look at the news and you will see that sinful choice gives rise to much of the friction in the Middle East today.

In spite of Sarah's sin, God kept his word to Abraham. Even after Sarah was in menopause, she conceived and gave birth to the promised son. His name was Isaac. Isaac married a beautiful woman named Rebekah. Like his mother, Rebekah had difficulty conceiving. Thankfully, rather than repeating the sins of his father, Isaac learned from the pain of his parents and instead of taking an alternate wife, Isaac prayed for his wife to conceive. God answered their prayers. Rebekah conceived fraternal twin boys named Jacob and Esau. Esau was a hairy total pagan. He had as much hair as a golden retriever. All he cared about was food and women — not a great guy. Jacob was not much better, except that he didn't have the hair so he didn't shed. After Jacob ripped off his father and brother, he ran away to save his skin and look for a godly wife. He thought he found that in a drop dead gorgeous woman named Rachel who was the daughter of his mother's brother. Jacob worked seven years for her. What he thought would be a great wedding night turned into disaster. Laban, his father-in-law, slipped into the honeymoon suite Rachel's ugly older sister named Leah. Jacob married, and made love to, the wrong woman. To eventually get Rachel, the woman he wanted, he ended up working for Laban another seven years. This was all part of Laban's plan to get more free work from Jacob. Thankfully Rachel was given to Jacob as payment up front.

As we begin our study we have Jacob unintentionally married to two women that both have a crush on him. These two weddings took place most likely a little more than a week apart. Ladies, do you see a potential conflict that would come into your home if you and your sister were in love with the same man and found yourself married to the same man with weddings a little more than a week apart? That is where we are about to go. Buckle up and hold on. This is stuff Jerry Springer doesn't touch.

When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing. Genesis 29:31–35 (ESV)

This was not a happy home. Jacob literally hated Leah. Some scholars do not think he literally hated her. The problem is the word is the Hebrew word for hate. It is the word used for an enemy. This was not mild dislike. This was hate. He never intended to marry her. He resented her intentional role in Laban's deceit and stealing his wedding night. He hated the fact she lied to him and tricked him when all night long on the night of the wedding under cover of darkness she pretended to be Rachel. He did not trust her. Every relationship is based on trust. If there is not trust, there is no relationship. Jacob was not allowed to divorce her because the terms of his contract with Laban didn't allow it. While Jacob was passionately in love with Rachel, he didn't even want to be around Leah. When she laughed, he didn't even smile. He tried to avoid her at

every opportunity. This was not good. Leah was married to him and she had a never-ending crush on him but Jacob hated her from day one. That is not a good way to start a marriage.

Some of the women this morning probably relate to Leah. You have a husband that doesn't love you or treat you with the respect you deserve. You are married but you almost wish you were single because your heart longs to be loved and your husband doesn't make you feel that way.

Even worse is that Jacob had options. He was married to Leah's younger and much more attractive sister at the same time. Jacob had absolutely no incentive to spend time with Leah when he had Rachel, the incredible ravishing beauty of his dreams desperate to be with him at the same time. You can see things were lopsided in this dysfunctional home.

As life unfolded, each woman had what the other woman wanted. Rachel had the beauty, affection and love of her husband, but she couldn't have kids. Leah was unloved. She was in a frigid marriage. She was hated by Jacob but she was incredibly fertile. All she needed to do was be intimate with him once and she would conceive. She was that fertile.

Now before you feel too sorry for Leah, realize she bore responsibility for her marital disaster. She had a crush on Jacob. She thought that if she could just get him to marry her and she could be his wife, she would be such an amazing wife that she could make him love her. That is a flawed strategy. Single ladies, your goal is not to marry the man you want and then try to force him to love you by providing him intimacy and children. Many women try that. They find

the man they want then they use intimacy and pregnancy to capture him. That doesn't work. He may stay with you but he will not necessarily love you.

Ladies, your goal is to marry the man who pursues you and does the hard work of earning your trust and respect, like Jacob did for Rachel when he worked seven years to get her. The man needs to pursue his wife and earn the trust and love of his wife. Ladies, it doesn't work when you flip it around and you pursue the man, then use your sexuality to try to capture and control him. If that is your plan, you will end up just like Leah. You will likely end up married to a man that doesn't truly love you and won't pursue you.

Ladies, marry the man that does the hard work of pursuing you because he wants you. Don't marry the man you can manipulate with your sexuality into marrying you. He won't love you and your heart will be empty, just like Leah's. Why do I say this? The reasons are not psychological but theological.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5 that the marriage relationship is a parallel relationship between Christ and the church. Christ is the groom, he pursued us, his bride. He paid for us at great cost out of his love for us. Christ is the initiator of the relationship with us. Christ is the one who did the hard work of purchasing us. We didn't pursue Christ and manipulate Christ into acquiring us. You cannot flip around the roles of Christ and the church and you cannot flip around the roles of a man and a woman in marriage. It doesn't work that way. Ladies, wait for a godly man who pursues you because he loves you. Wait for a man who is willing to pay a great price for you because he has chosen to love you, not the other way around. Avoid the Leah syndrome.

The good news for Leah is that while Jacob didn't love her, God did. God has a special love for those whose lives are particularly difficult. That is good news for us today. Leah, on those occasional times Jacob provided her with conjugal rights, conceived in a jiffy. The first child she conceived was a son. She called him Reuben, which means *see a son*. She said, "God looked upon the misery in my marriage and now my husband will love me because I gave him a child." It is bad news when you name your first child after the misery in your marriage because you feel so unloved. I told you this was a dysfunctional family. She hoped having a child would turn Jacob's heart to love her instead of her sister. She could provide Jacob with something Rachel couldn't give, children.

Leah — Miss Fertile — conceived again and had a second son. His name was Simeon. Simeon means *God heard*. She named him Simeon to remind everyone that God heard her crying herself to sleep at night. She was hated. I picture Jacob coming home from work and night after night taking Rachel to the bedroom leaving Leah crying herself to sleep on the couch, desperate to be loved. What a bummer of a name for this kid in school. When everyone heard the name Simeon they know he was given that name because his dad hated his mom and she cried herself to sleep most nights.

She eventually gave birth to a third son she called Levi, which means *attachment*. She was desperate for her husband to finally be attached to her, to finally want her, to finally acknowledge her in public, to finally hold her hand. I picture the family walking in the park with Jacob holding hands with Rachel as he snuck kisses on her cheek while Leah walked 20 feet behind them. She had

three kids in diapers. She was pushing a double stroller and had Levi in a baby sling but she walked by herself. Jacob ignored her. Her marriage was miserable; she was crying and lonely. She hoped her third child would finally force Jacob to acknowledge her and give her a little love. Jacob would have none of it. He still hated her. In fact the word in the Hebrew used to describe the kind of physical relationship between them was not a loving and enjoyable physical relationship. It was used to describe a forced physical relationship done out of duty but not out of desire. That was not a happy home.

She next cranked out a fourth kid that she called Judah, which simply means *praise the Lord*. After three kids and still sleeping alone at night and Jacob still treating her with coldness and hatred she just gave up on having the affection of her husband. She simply said, "Praise the Lord, I had a kid. I am thankful for my children but I will never have the one thing I want in life, which is the loving affection of my husband. I am ugly. Guys never paid attention to me. Now my husband ignores me. I am trapped in my marriage to Jacob and he treats me like a rotten fish." Life was not good.

Can you picture the dinner table? Jacob sat at the head of the table. On one side was Leah trying to breastfeed one child, feed Cheerios to another child and spoon feed Gerber green peas to another child while feeding baby cereal to another child. She was maxed out as a mom. On the other side of the table was Rachel, sitting alone listlessly pushing her food around the plate. Can you imagine the tension in the room? Can you imagine the girl fights when Jacob was at work?

Leah had the children she wanted but she didn't have the love she desired. Some of you ladies find yourself in the exact same place. I want you to see that divorce was not an option for Leah. She hung in there. While Jacob didn't hear the pain in her heart, God did. God cared for her. God loved her and opened her womb. Ladies, when you go through those hard times in your marriage, know God may be allowing those times in your life to draw you closer to him. What Leah needed to know is she was loved by God with a greater love than Jacob could ever give her. The hard times in her marriage were used by God to turn her from trying to fill the relational hole in her heart with the love of a man to filling it with the love God had for her.

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her." So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali. Genesis 30:1-8 (ESV)

Rachel was not happy. As Leah cranked out kid after kid Rachel became incredibly jealous of her sister. She became incredibly possessive of Jacob. Eventually she took her anger out on her husband and screamed, "Give me children, or I will die!" This is funny but it is sad. She blamed her husband for her inability to have children. It is obvious the problem was not with Jacob. Jacob and Leah were incredibly fertile. The problem was with Rachel. She may have been incredibly feminine. She may have been incredibly beautiful. She may

have been the kind of a girl men couldn't take their eyes off but she couldn't be a mother. She couldn't do the one thing every woman wants to do, have a child.

I want you to notice how she handled her anger. She blamed Jacob for her problem. Isn't this what we do when something doesn't go our way in marriage? We blame our spouses for our own problems. It is called blame shifting. I see this with husbands who complain their wives aren't interested in them after a long day at work. The husband blames a stale marriage on his wife. Later, I discover he doesn't take any time during the day to fuel her emotional tank by telling her she is loved, special and valuable. The lack of attention he is getting from his wife is just a reflection of the lack of attention he is giving to his wife. He is the source of his own marital problems but he is blame shifting it to her, just like Rachel was blaming her marital problems on Jacob.

Jacob was not much better. He became angry at her emotional outburst. He yelled at her and said, "Am I in the place of God who withheld from you the fruit of the womb? Are you nuts woman? It is not my fault. It is God's fault." While Jacob was telling the truth, he handled Rachel the wrong way. The Hebrew uses a special word to tell us how he yelled at her. It literally says Jacob became hot in the nose. That was a way of saying he became red in the face. He lost it and yelled at her big time. He tore her up one side and down the other. This was a huge argument. Jacob told the truth but it was the way he told Rachel the truth. More important than what you say is how you say what you say. Rachel was wrong because she was emotional and she was blaming Jacob for a problem that was her own, which is often what happens when people get

emotional. Jacob was also wrong because he let his emotions get the best of him and even though he was technically right he destroyed Rachel as he vented his rage on her with no patience or kindness. He should have spoken kindly to her. He should have been gentle and understanding. He should have learned from his father and put his arm around her and turned to God in prayer with her, asking God to help her conceive. He didn't. He just ripped her up.

Since Jacob failed to provide the loving leadership Rachel needed in her emotional nightmare, Rachel let her emotions get the best of her and she made a sinful plan to get children. Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob. She completely disregarded the lessons learned from all the disaster of Grandma Sarah had with Hagar. Jacob's yelling at her, instead of comforting her, led to a third woman in Jacob's bedroom. Technically, Bilhah was not an equal wife but a concubine. She was serving Rachel by providing her children. Nevertheless she was another woman in his bedroom. She cranked out two kids.

The first one Rachel named Dan, which means *judged and vindicated*. "God heard my cry that I am losing the baby battle so he gave me a child." The next child was called Naphtali, which means *wrestling*. She literally sees herself wrestling with her sister and sees herself as making a comeback in the wrestling match with her sister in the birth of that son. It is incredibly dysfunctional to name your children after a battle with your sister to see who can have more children. This had to crush these kids when they grew up.

I picture a star chart on the refrigerator. Rachel was behind but she was catching up, Leah was only ahead 4-2. The problem is two can play at the same game.

When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher. Genesis 30:9-13 (ESV)

Apparently, Leah noticed Jacob liked a new woman in his life. Leah took her younger servant girl and gave her to Jacob. Then Jacob had four women in the bedroom. Zilpah popped out two kids. The first Leah named Gad. Gad means *good fortune or good luck*. Leah was not naming her kids after her loveless marriage. At this point she just called her son good luck. This is like naming your kid Vegas or Lotto. The next kid was named Asher, which means *happiness*. Leah was happy. She was giving her husband more kids. These are not good child names. They all reveal that for these women, happiness was not found in their marriage. Happiness was found in winning the child-bearing competition.

In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes." When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me,

because I have borne him six sons.” So she called his name Zebulun. Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah. Genesis 30:14–21 (ESV)

By this time Reuben, Leah’s oldest, was probably around 5. He was wandering around the field and he found some mandrakes that he brought to his mother. Mandrakes are also known as love apples. They are talked about in the Song of Solomon. They were believed to arouse sexual desire and were considered a remedy for infertility. The flowers of the plant have a strong smell and the plant has a narcotic property.



Even though Rachel had children through her maid, she was still desperate to bear her own. The children through Bilhah, the surrogate mother, didn’t satisfy. Rachel was willing to try anything to increase her fertility. This is the lady that goes to the local GNC that buys all the herbal fertility drugs to get pregnant. That is what Rachel was doing.

Here we get a snapshot of the bitterness between Leah and Rachel. Leah says, “Isn’t it enough that you have taken away my husband, now you want my son’s mandrakes also?” Apparently Rachel controlled the bedroom. Jacob only slept with the woman Rachel allowed him to sleep with when she said it was OK. Rachel knew that if Jacob slept with Leah there was a high likelihood she would conceive. Rachel had Leah off Jacob’s bedroom calendar. Rachel demanded Jacob in her bedroom every night while the other wives were left alone. I told you this family was right off Jerry Springer.

In exchange for the mandrakes, which Rachel hoped would get her pregnant, Rachel let Leah have a one-night stand with Jacob. The result was

another son named Issachar, which means *paid or hired*. Forever his name memorialized he was conceived by sex-for-hire. Sex-for-hire is a bad name to give your kid. It totally messes them up in junior high when they figure out the birds and the bees.

Later, Leah was with Jacob again and she conceived another son named *Zebulon which means honored or the champion*. Guess what. Leah declared herself the winner! She had eight kids to Rachel's two, none of which she conceived on her own. Leah declared herself the champion of the baby battle! Rachel was hopeless. The surrogate mother trick didn't satisfy. The mandrake herbal remedy trick didn't help. The ravishing beauty would never be a mom. She gave up hope and she had nothing to depend on but God, which is exactly the position God wants each of us to be.

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!" Genesis 30:22–24 (ESV)

When Rachel was finally broken and all of her plans failed and she had nothing left to rely on, is when God opened her womb and she conceived. Isn't that the way God works? It is when we finally give up all hope and have nothing to rely on that God answers our prayers and he comes through. She named her son *Joseph which means, "may I have another son?"* As you can see, she desperately wanted more kids. She did have another son named Benjamin but she did not survive the birth.

Life Applications

While I pointed out a few great applications along the way, here are a few overarching applications we find in this chapter.

1. **The God-sized hole in our hearts can only be filled by God.** Everybody in this story wanted what they didn't have. Leah couldn't be happy unless she had the affection of her husband. Rachel couldn't be happy unless she had children. Both of them thought getting what they didn't have would provide the happiness they wanted. It reminds me of Christmas. As a child, do you remember giving your parents a Christmas list? Do you remember looking for the presents? Do you remember counting down the days for Christmas, knowing that if you received the gift you asked for you would be the happiest person in the world? Do you remember the excitement of Christmas morning and getting up early and staring at the clock until it was 8 a.m. so you were allowed to wake your parents and start opening the gifts? Here is the problem. After I opened the presents, and played with them, I was bored to death by 2 p.m. Are Christmas presents a good thing? Yes! Does getting the gift you want provide happiness? Yes. The problem is getting what you don't have cannot satisfy our hearts because once we get what we want, we are unsatisfied and we start over again. That was Leah. Each child didn't satisfy her heart. She lived consumed with what she didn't have. That was also Rachel. The only thing that can satisfy our hearts is knowing we are loved by God and saved by his son, Jesus. It is so easy to live like Leah and Rachel and think the one thing we don't have will bring us happiness. Some of you think happiness will come with a promotion in your career. Others of you

think happiness will be found in a spouse. Some of you think happiness is found in having children. The truth of the matter is children, a spouse, and a good career are good things and we should strive toward but once we get them realize they won't satisfy our hearts. Our hearts are created to only be satisfied in knowing Jesus and walking with him every day. We will always have something we want but don't have, and when we get it, just like Christmas presents, it will only satisfy for a moment. Knowing and walking with the God that loves you is the only thing that can satisfy you forever.

- 2. Don't be surprised when you discover God's people are messed up people.** This was an incredibly dysfunctional family. They were a complete mess. This would knock Dr. Phil off his stool. Here is what I find comforting. This is not the only messy family situation in the Bible. God loves to use messy families and messy people for his glory. The church is a hospital for sinners, not a gym for the spiritual elite. Jacob's family was messed up. My family is messed up. Your family is messed up, just like the rest of the heroes of the Bible. Abraham, the father of our faith was a perpetual liar under pressure. When Moses was under pressure, he had an anger problem. He once killed a guy. Another time he smashed the Ten Commandments written by the very finger of God. Another time he struck a rock in anger instead of speaking to it. Elijah struggled with depression and quitting. David was an adulterer and murder. Peter denied Christ three times. Paul had such an ego problem that God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. Jacob's family was messed up. The heroes of the Bible were messed up.

When you meet other Christians with messy lives that are struggling with sin, expect it. Christians aren't the spiritual elite. They are messed up people that need God's forgiveness and kindness through Jesus.

3. **God's people are a grand display of grace to the undeserving.** Think about this incredibly messed up family — two competitive sisters, two maids and one man. From this family comes the 12 tribes of Israel. This is the family that raised the children that changed the world. In Revelation 21 it says about the New Jerusalem which will be our home in eternity.

...on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed... Revelation 21:12 (ESV)

One gate says Reuben — which means see, a son, in my miserable marriage I can't get my husband to notice me. Another gate has over it Simeon — which means heard. God heard me crying myself to sleep. Another gate has Levi — which means attachment; I wish my husband would desire me. Another gate has Issachar — which means you were the child I paid for. Nobody in this family deserved to walk into heaven or see his name written over the very gates to the city. They were all messed up people that God in his grace reached down and saved in spite of their sin. It is the same for us and everyone else in heaven. None of us deserve to be there. Heaven is a great display of God's amazing love and grace for people who don't deserve it. Dysfunctional people from dysfunctional families, just like you and me. Genesis 29 and 30 shows us how dysfunctional a family can become. Revelation 21 shows us God's amazing grace to dysfunctional families like yours and mine.

Before we leave, I want to speak to those of you who have been here for a while. Maybe for you, the stories of Genesis are starting to make sense. You are interested in God, Jesus and the Bible but you haven't stepped over the line and become a full-on Christian. The centerpiece of the Bible is that God loves you. He sent his son Jesus to die on the cross and pay for all our sin plus he rose from the dead to give us a new life. Here is the offer he makes to you. He offers to forgive your sin, adopt you into his family and change you from the inside out making you more and more like Jesus. Here is what he asks. He asks you to confess your sin and give him the steering wheel of your life. If you haven't done that, I invite you to take that step and join me in prayer.

Dear Jesus, I ask you to forgive my sins. Please adopt me into your family. I give you control of my life. Make me a new person from the inside out.

If you prayed that prayer, I want you to look up at me for a moment. In your bulletin is a worship response card. If you trusted in Christ put down your name and contact information so we can pray for you and help you begin your journey. We look forward to someday being in heaven and maybe our names will be written there as people who don't deserve it. One thing is for sure, we are dysfunctional people from dysfunctional families that God has chosen to love.



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